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Counseling: an Expression of the Ministry of the Church

Abstract

This introductory article is designed to introduce the concepts of pastoral counseling to the Hispanic community, which frequently does not have a developed ministry of pastoral counseling in their churches. This article discusses the biblical basis for this ministry and helps define it in light of the strong relational nature and existing practice of advice giving found within Hispanic cultures. Seeing pastoral counseling as an extension of community care and as more closely related to the informal practice of giving advice, helps make the ministry of pastoral counseling and pastoral care more accessible to ministries within the Hispanic community.

Key Words: pastoral counseling, pastoral care, church, ministry, Hispanic

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What is Counseling?

In any attempt at formal training in the area of counseling¹, be it clinical or conducted in the context of the church's ministry, or just offered by those who want to help a friend find a better way out of a predicament, we must begin by providing a definition to help understand what counseling is and what it is not. One difficulty that makes this very complex, is the fact that the word "counseling," or any other connotation or term to suggest that activity, has been a part of our popular language long before it was assimilated and re-defined by professionals in the field of psychology and mental health.² On the other hand, and as is nicely explained by Daniel Schipani,³ Spanish speakers have no consistent consensus on the meaning and use of the term. The richness of our language, the diversity of our people, and the geographic spread of Spanish speaking people complicate the reaching of a unified definition of what counseling and its practice actually means.

However, based on my personal and professional experience, I have concluded that most of the people I have had contact with in the Americas, intuitively assign this term to those activities where one person tries to help another by using words, or verbal and body expressions to provide some encouragement, relief, guidance, or solution to a problem. So far, I have not found much controversy in using the term "counseling" this way.

Let me use a personal illustration. Some time ago I was in the car with my then, 11-year old daughter, who shared with me a situation that happened at school to her, where she had listened and encouraged a classmate who had been discouraged by some school problems. After hearing her story, I commented that I thought she had advised her friend well and should consider a career in counseling. She just smiled in response to my remark. It was clear to me that she understood that her current role was to advise.⁴ It seems that even at an early age, the term "counseling" represented an activity that seemed natural for human beings.

Two questions that immediately arise are: "What do we mean when we say we are advising someone?" and, "In what way does this resemble the counseling process we are trying to address in this article?" Obviously, it would be very presumptuous to pretend to arrive at a definition that will satisfy everyone in his or her own diverse context. A more practical and achievable mission is to examine some ways of understanding this process, in order to see how it operates so that it becomes possible to facilitate the development of a community that helps others in all dimensions of life.

We begin with The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language's definition of "counseling,"⁵ which is "the position of counselor, or the function of one who advises." Obviously this is not a very precise definition for the purposes of our discussion. However, in a simple way, this definition fits very well

with what appears to be the most common or popular understanding of the counseling process, that is, the activity carried on by one who gives advice.

The same source continues to define “advice” as “an opinion or suggestion that is given or taken to do, or not to do, something.” The integration of both definitions could lead to the conclusion that the term “counseling” refers to the process of pointing someone in a certain direction, or to provide any criteria that helps the listener to resolve a doubt, conflict, or problem. This would be the activity that provides advice, that is, giving instruction, an opinion, or advice in order to help the counseled person out of their current situation. This understanding of the word “counseling” implies a directive attitude on the part of the person offering the advice, and a docile, passive, and/or receptive attitude on the part of the recipient. This also suggests a clear hierarchy, where counseling is perceived as an advantage, where one person has the knowledge and experience to guide the other person to their goal, plus it is assumed that the counselor has deciphered the maze of life and achieved a better situation than the one being advised.

The Bible offers a clear illustration of this model of counseling. In the book of Exodus we find the classic story of Moses, who after leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert on their journey to the Promised Land, stood in front of Mount Sinai when he visited his father-in-law Jethro. The biblical story says that,

The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”

Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.”

Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you.”⁶

Given this tremendous spectacle, Jethro could not help but sympathize with his son-in-law and make some recommendations to help him successfully perform the task of guiding the people. What’s interesting about this event is that in several of the translations of this passage, the word used to refer to these suggestions Jethro gives Moses is “advice”. In

that use of the word “advice”, Jethro immediately becomes a counselor. This is the case, then, where someone sees or hears what is happening, and using common sense, experience, and/or knowledge, provides suggestions or guidelines to facilitate the process in question. We have no evidence to indicate that Jethro was devoted to counseling as a profession, vocation, or even as a form of entertainment. However, he knew how to listen, observe, and provide timely advice. Jethro used his position as a patriarch, an elder, and as a father-in-law, which gave him the authority to advise the servant of God, who effectively applied the advice received.

This is a clear situation with which most of us can identify. I am sure many of us can relate situations where, after witnessing or hearing about something that seemed wrong or seemed to be going in the wrong direction, we used our array of personal experiences and knowledge to help. Situations like this make us counselors, if we agree with this way of defining counseling. Clearly, this type of counseling provides a service that every community needs. If only we were more attentive to the advice given by those who are ahead of us in life, and followed it, we would have saved a lot of headaches. However, this understanding of counseling does not do justice to more complex and organized processes found in its practice, whether in pastoral counseling or at the clinical level.

Continuing our exploration of the term and practice of counseling, we now turn to the contributions made by the area of pastoral counseling. For example, R. F. Hurding⁷ defines counseling as “an activity that seeks to help others achieve constructive change in some or all aspects of life, in the context of a caring relationship, where the boundaries are clearly defined.” Then the author continues differentiating counseling and psychotherapy by emphasizing two points; first, psychotherapy, according to Hurding, makes more deliberate and consistent use of psychological techniques and procedures, and second, the relationship that is developed in psychotherapy is essentially and exclusively, a professional relationship.

A definition like this perceives counseling as a discipline with a more “informal”⁸ character than psychotherapy, with a more personal and familial relationship, rather than a contractual relationship with a tone such as Hurding suggests occurs in psychotherapy. Here we suggest a model of pastoral counseling where psychological procedures are just tools of a second order, that is, to be used sporadically and only when needed, rather than to be understood as an integral part of any process of giving advice. One concern that arises in this approach is that, even when the author does not clearly present it this way, his definition implies that the practice of counseling does not require a professional level of training and structure to achieve maximum effectiveness in attaining the proposed level of care.

In an attempt to facilitate the understanding of the differences between these types of helping, Donald S. Browning⁹ offers three levels of pastoral work: *pastoral care*, *pastoral counseling*, and *pastoral psychotherapy*. Basically, Browning notes that the difference lies in the structural strength of the relationship given. That is, the level of the helping relationship is defined by the relational distance or closeness between the pastor and his or her parishioner. The more inclusive and closer relationship occurs in the context of pastoral care, since it includes formal and informal conversations, dialogues, and other types of interactions that do not respond to the limitations of space or time. You could say that this relationship suggests very vulnerable, fuzzy and fragile limits, while expectations are vast and varied.

At the other extreme, pastoral psychotherapy is presented as the most specialized of the three types. It is at this level that the relationship requires a contract with clauses specifying the expectations of the pastoral work. Additionally, this level of support assumes a professional framing, characterized by a greater distance of relationship modulated by therapeutic intentions, and for a fundamental and consistent use of psychological theories that inform the counseling process. Here the limits are much clearer and well defined.

Finally, we find pastoral counseling right in the middle of the two other levels mentioned. The relationship at this level requires more structure than in pastoral care, but not as much clarity of boundaries or rigidity like in pastoral psychotherapy. He argues that pastoral counseling is a mixture of certain features of the other two levels, producing a relationship with a certain level of professionalism and flexibility. The potential problem with this understanding of pastoral counseling is that if the elements are not mixed properly, the result could be counterproductive and even harmful.

Let me illustrate it this way. I run a similar risk when I am preparing my coffee. All good consumers of the pleasures offered by good coffee know that if you want to enjoy a good cup of that blessed elixir, it is necessary to combine a good quality coffee with other adequate ingredients. The optimum result is only achieved when the coffee is at the right temperature, has a hypnotic scent, as well as a flavor with the desired level of acidity. But what happens when we are faced with the differences of other people's taste? For example, when I make coffee for my wife, I need to remember that she likes a mixture of half a cup of milk and a quarter cup of coffee, but not too hot, but I like it strong and warm, with only a little cream and no milk.

As you can see, this combination of ingredients can be very complicated, as we all have very different ways to "prepare" things. In processes much more complex and serious than the preparation of coffee, such as pastoral counseling, preferences may determine that a successful session for one

person, may be a big failure for another. Hence, it is necessary to have as clear a definition as possible, one that does not leave much room for confusion arising from personal preference or individual perspectives.

One last definition to explore here is that offered by Julia Batista Cortés,¹⁰ who argues that, “Pastoral counseling is the process by which the pastor facilitates an understanding of the conflictual situation and directs the counselee in deciding how to manage it. Faith resources, such as prayer, Bible reading and analysis, and reflection on God’s intervention in the lives of believers, are also utilized.”

In a previous page, and referring to the person of the counselor, the same author says: “. . .generally, a pastoral counselor is a helping professional with limited knowledge of the proper use of clinical models. However, some of these models can be turned into operational modalities of application, managed by counselors without extensive training.”¹¹

These two paragraphs summarize key ideas that require some more exploration on our part. The pastor is seen here as someone who facilitates a higher level of understanding or comprehension of the issue or conflict in question, while also focusing on advising about or recommending decisions that may affect the progress and possible outcome of the conflict or dilemma. In this role, the counselor is playing a quasi-managerial role, that is, the counselor is not fully in charge of the direction of the counseling, nor takes a position of an spectator of the process who is not involved in indicating the points that need to be addressed by the counselee. Again, we are talking about a delicate balance between observing and guiding, waiting, and taking the initiative.

The other striking point in this discussion is the idea that, although pastoral counselors have a limited knowledge and use of theories and clinical models, there is a possibility of integrating practical and abridged versions of some of these models, augmenting in that way, the skills and tools available to use in counseling. This is critical and non-negotiable for those who argue that pastoral counseling should be done only from the Bible and theology, without the intervention of theories and psychological or psychiatric practices.¹² Unfortunately there are many examples of situations where the lack of clinical resources and tools did more harm than good, just as there are many cases where the pure clinical approximation, without any reference to faith and Christian spirituality, only caused more problems. There is a very important place for the direct or indirect use of the scriptures, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and the experience of faith in the counseling process, as well as the application of theories and psychological interventions.

On the other hand, the paragraphs mentioned above may be interpreted as implying the belief that pastoral counseling is the exclusive function of

the clergy of the church. That is, those who identify themselves as pastors, leaving no room for the pastoral ministry of the whole community of faith. Clearly, not all are called to counsel others, but many are, and the church itself, in its calling to minister and disciple others, has no choice but to include counseling as part of its pastoral service to others.

At this point, it is useful to remember Schipani's words when referring to the pastoral care of the church, which suggests that it should be understood as: "... the multifaceted task of the community of faith, in light of God's project for the world, in the midst of our concrete social reality."¹³ In simple words, Jorge Barro says: "the pastoral role is, therefore, the mission of the whole and not solely the task of the pastor. Going much further, it is the charge of all the people (the universal priesthood of all believers) for all people."¹⁴ That is, pastoring is everyone's duty, to everyone. One of the aspects of this task is precisely the recognition that counseling is for you and your neighbors. In this sense, Schipani says "the church should be a place of health and healing, and an ecology of care and discipleship."¹⁵ We are called, then, to allow the Holy Spirit to heal us, so that we can be used to heal others, becoming then, the true community of the King.¹⁶

How Do We Understand Counseling?

So far we have explored some authors, who from different contexts have reflected on the practice of counseling. My purpose has been to create a foundation that allows us to build our own understanding of this fundamental function of the church. As can be seen, all of these definitions make important contributions. My duty is now to try to integrate these definitions with my own experiences and knowledge of the practice of counseling. It is worth remembering that I use the term counseling in the generic sense, that is, in a general way and applicable to different levels of practice. When necessary, I will clarify my meaning more precisely.

Counseling is a contractual relationship between at least two people,¹⁷ where the counselor makes use of all available resources - spiritual and psychological - to facilitate the whole development of individuals and communities, and bring healing, restoration, reconciliation, and resolution to relationships and situations of conflict, injustice, and disease, thus collaborating with the Holy Spirit in the formation of a new person¹⁸ and establishing the Kingdom of God.

It is important to remember that there is no definition that satisfies everyone, here we can only propose one definition that can allow us to define the scope of our conversation, without sacrificing a pastoral psychology that is faithful to the sound doctrine found in the scriptures. However, the definition proposed in the previous paragraph includes elements that require further explanation. I intend to take on that task in the following pages.

Counseling as a Relationship

I will start by saying that counseling is primarily, and above all, a relationship or connection where, in an intentional and genuine way, the people involved create a common space for mutual knowing and understanding. This refers to the investment of time and the creation of the space required for a connection that is vital, authentic, and safe. On this point, I agree with Parsons¹⁹ when he says: “Therapy²⁰ is *realized* in the counseling relationship and would not systematically occur outside of that context. The quality of the counseling relationship is, therefore, keystone to the helping process and thus needs to be of primary concern to all pastoral counselors.” In addition, the quality of that relationship will be defined by the level of investment that both sides make to think, feel, experience, and analyze together, mutually influencing each other in the process.²¹

The idea of considering counseling as a relationship contradicts the tendency of many to rush to answer, do and solve, rather than take the necessary time to listen, experience, understand and know. I think we have all had the experience of trying to explain ourselves as well as possible but, without having finished explaining the situation, we were interrupted by our interlocutor, who already had some “advice” or opinion. Situations like these leave us with the impression that we were not heard or understood, much less known by the other; certainly there was an encounter, but not a relationship. Two people can meet without having to share or exchange, much less, *know* each other. The result is like trying to mix oil and water, both substances will always separate from each other, even if they are in the same jar. In other words, neither person can “contaminate,” or influence, the other.

There are more casual, or even accidental situations in counseling, where, if the people involved decide to, it is possible to generate the required quality of the relationship as we have defined it. We all remember the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.²² Without sacrificing the theological purpose and hermeneutic wealth of this passage, I will dare to use it as an example of this point. It is clear from the passage that, humanly speaking, without counting divine omniscience; neither Jesus nor the Samaritan woman had met before this moment. Both share an encounter, seemingly casual, which became transformational, not only for her, but also for many in her community. Of note is the fact that Jesus takes the time to experience the heat and fatigue of the moment, and share it with this future disciple when he asks her for water. In the process of sharing the well and the water, he listens and responds. Jesus spends the time and pays the necessary attention to mark her life, and that of many others in her village. It is clear that the effectiveness of Jesus’ ministry responded to a variety of elements, and not only to his great ability to relate to those with whom he was in contact; however, there is much evidence that

confirms that those who physically met him were significantly affected by his availability and capability to both know the other person and be known by them. This is the kind of relationship that transforms and changes people.

Let us clarify that not all relationships are positive; there are some so destructive that people wish they had never occurred at all. Here, I am referring to a relationship that builds, creates, and re-creates those involved. This type of relationship is only possible as an extension of the grace and mercy of God, who interacts with Himself as the triune God, and who created human beings, the crown of creation, to relate to Him forever.²³

The first chapter of the book of Genesis recounts God's creative acts. For five days, God gave the task of creating day and night, the heavens, the oceans, seas and rivers, vegetation, sun and moon, and the flying, crawling, and swimming creatures of the earth; but it was not until the sixth day, that God, in relation to Himself, and as a team, created human beings. Only on this day do we read that the creative effort occurs in the context of a divine relationship, and as a product of the counsel of the Trinity. According to the biblical account, the rest of creation came after God spoke. There is no evidence in the text to argue that the Creator was given the task of consulting, thinking, or evaluating and as a team, create the rest of the universe, as happened when He created both man and woman. In the latter case, the Triune God got together, took time, and showed off creating the most sophisticated, complex, and beautiful part of creation.

Hoekema,²⁴ when analyzing the original text, puts it as follows, "... we should interpret the plural as indicating that God does not exist as a solitary being, but as a being in fellowship with 'others.' Though we cannot say that we have here clear teaching about the Trinity, we do learn that God exists as a 'plurality.' What is here merely hinted at is further developed in the New Testament into the doctrine of the Trinity."

In creation, human beings arise as an extension of the same divine nature: "... in the image of God, He created." In other words, this creation is a representation of God Himself, carrying some divine traits. Hoekema²⁵ argues that one of the divine aspects that God decided to share with humans was God's relational nature, that is, as God does not live in solitude, human beings were created to interact, share, consult, and commune with each other. Everything good and bad happens in an environment shared by others, in relationship.

The text goes on to say that humanity was created with differences: "... male and female he created them." Many tend to see differences as a threat because it is much easier to relate to those who look like me, think like me, and act like me. It is always more pleasant to relate to those who do not pose a challenge or a threat to us. Differences challenge us; they force us to leave our familiar preferences and consider the possibility that my perspective is

not the only one, nor the best. Nevertheless, differences also complement and enrich us. The only way I know I am different is when I notice the differences of others, which only happens when I relate to them. While I am alone, or just with those who look like me, it is not possible to see differences, and life becomes more dull and boring.

I remember the example my friend and colleague, Dr. Tapiwa Mucherera, shared with me. Tapiwa is a pastoral counseling professor who is originally from Zimbabwe, Africa. He did not realize the fact that he spoke English with an accent until someone in the United States told him. In his country, everyone who spoke English sounded the same, so he did not realize he had any particular accent. The difference in the pronunciation of English in this country caused him to realize that there are other accents in the world.

Finally, the new being created by God was appointed to a very specific mission, to relate with the rest of creation: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” On one hand, it is clear that it was God Himself who gave humans the mission and did not leave it as a choice. Jorge E. Maldonado²⁶ explains it this way:

The church does not invent its ministries, only obeys what it has been called to. These are part of the overall mission of the church, which is none other than the mission of the Father, revealed in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and manifested with power through the Holy Spirit. So all ministries, including pastoral counseling,²⁷ have their origin in God Himself. The church needs to assume the ministry of counseling as certainly pastoral.

Our being and doing come from God. It is God who gives meaning to our lives and our ministry. The other point that we rescue from that passage is the reference that the work of the church only occurs in a relational context. The kingdom of God is expressed in the context of a relational ecology, where we, first and foremost worship our king, and in obedience to his delegation and mandate, care for and manage the rest of creation but only in community, evaluating the impact that our intervention in creation has on the rest of the global community. We cannot fulfill our mission on earth without the company and help of others, nor can we neglect our mission and ecological responsibility.

What I want to emphasize here is that relating to others is part of our genetic code, part of our nature as human beings, and it is also the context in which the act of creation and re-creation by God occurs. In some measure, counseling provides a space for divine intervention in the lives of many people. It is in the context of counseling that God repairs much

of the damage done by destructive relationships or a lack of healthy ones. In other words, the frame of counseling is God's workshop, where God, by the presence and direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, heals, re-places, re-builds, re-news, and transforms the damage done by sin and the work of the prince of darkness. It is imperative to conceptualize counseling as a multidimensional relationship where the Triune God is present and active, using therapeutic interventions, whether intentional or not, conscious or unconscious, and the verbal and non-verbal exchanges of those involved, to draw them near to Him.

In this sense, counseling becomes one more element of God's redemptive plan. Paul summed it up this way: "For God was pleased to dwell in Him (Jesus) in all fullness and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross."²⁸ The mission of God is to bring us closer to Him; and God, in His wisdom and grace, has decided to use the church as the missionary agent to carry out this supreme task, to the glory and honor of His name.²⁹ It is in this context, that this *missionary* church, or agent of God's mission, develops specific outreach ministries to those in need of reconciliation, in order to disciple them for Christ, so that they can enjoy the fruit of this reconciliation with their Creator, which is Shalom, the true and complete peace of God. Counseling is one of those ministries that the church uses to facilitate the encounter between God and His creation. Pat Contreras Ulloa,³⁰ defines pastoral psychology³¹ as, "... a ministry contributing to the overall health, by the restoration, growth, and empowerment of human beings, both in their personality and in their relationships, in their historic and cultural context, so that every person and every community can achieve the goal of human fulfillment, which God has called us to in Christ Jesus."

In this sense, counseling can be seen as part of God's redemptive relationship. It is in this context that the Holy Spirit's presence is evident, by inviting counselees to gain new understanding of their life's dynamics, hardships and sorrows, and a fresh vision of God's plan for people's lives. Of course, this is a relationship with unique characteristics and well-defined parameters, requiring special attention, or else, the relationship would lose its effectiveness and functionality.

Let us conclude, then, by claiming that counseling is a relationship between three persons, the counselor, the counselee and the Triune God, who uses every resource available, in the here and now of the therapeutic moment, to reveal Himself, bringing healing, restoration, and reconciliation to His creation. It is God's presence, in that particular time and space that makes it Christian counseling; a concrete expression of the ministry to which the church has been called.

End Notes

¹ Some very good arguments exist to suggest the use of the term “advise” instead of “counseling.” For example, Daniel S. Schipani, *Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispanas*, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., 3-25. Decatur, GA: Libros AETH., 1997, explains his choice of the term rather than pastoral counseling, and Paul Polischuck in *El Consejo Terapéutico: Manual para Pastores y Consejeros*, defined therapeutic advice as “a complex entity that encompasses a variety of approaches with the intention of helping other people...”

² Leona Tyler, *The Work of the Counselor*, 3rd ed. 1969. Here we are assuming that the word and the practice of “counseling” is not unique, nor was an invention of the mental health disciplines. Gary S. Belkin, 1988, identifies six different resources from which the counseling profession originated. These resources date from the late 19th century. There are many historical evidences proving that counseling, especially as a practice, has existed since ancient ages.

³ *Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispanas*, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., Decatur, GA: Libros AETH, 1997.

⁴ It is important to note that my children live with two professional counselors and counseling educators, so it is a family practice to talk about counseling with them.

⁵ Real Academia Española, 2001, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, 22nd ed. Accessed from, <http://www.rae.es/recursos/diccionarios/drae>.

⁶ Exodus 18:13-27.

⁷ R. F. Hurding, “Pastoral Care, Counseling and Psychotherapy.” In *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, by David J. Atkinson and David F. Field, eds., 78-87. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

⁸ The term “informal” is being used to emphasize the non-use of rules, norms, and conventions required in the practice of psychotherapy.

⁹ Donald S. Browning, “Introduction to Pastoral Counseling.” In *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*, Vol. 1, by Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons, Donald E. Capps, eds. 5-13. New York: Paulist Press.1993 p. 5-7.

¹⁰ Julia Batista Cortés, “Modelos de Intervención en la Consejería Pastoral.” In *Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispanas*, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., 51-65. Decatur, GA: Libros AETH, 1997, p.52.

¹¹ Cortés, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹² Jay Adams, *Manual del Consejero Cristiano*, Barcelona, Spain: Books Clie, 1984.

¹³ Daniel S. Schipani, “Bases Eclesiológicas: La Iglesia Como Comunidad Sanadora.” In *Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispanas*, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., 3-25. Decatur, GA: Libros AETH, 1997, p.17.

¹⁴ Jorge Barro, “San Francisco de Asís: Un Modelo Pastoral.” *Boletín Teológico*, 29(66): 33-58, April- June 1997, p. 36.

¹⁵ Schipani, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁶ The Kingdom Community refers to all those who belong to the kingdom of God. The Church, as a community, belongs to their Lord, who is the king of this new kingdom. This kingdom is present and active in the history of humankind, deeply interested in all aspects of the present and the future of those who know him and serve God, as well as those not yet participating in God’s kingdom. The

Church serves as the agent of this kingdom, infiltrating the lines of the anti-kingdom and doing the work commissioned by her Lord and King. For a wider and more in depth discussion of this topic, read the book *The Community of the King*, 2nd ed., 2004, Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, by Howard A. Snyder.

¹⁷ It should be clarified that this relationship can also be given to couples, families, and groups. Obviously these other methods require special skills and abilities.

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:23-24.

¹⁹ Richard D. Parsons, "The Counseling Relationship." In *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*, Vol. 1, by Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons, Donald E. Capps, eds. 97-117. New York: Paulist Press, 1993, p. 97.

²⁰ Understand that here, counseling and therapy are synonyms, even if it can be argued that there are sufficient differences between them.

²¹ Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

²² John 4:1-30.

²³ Genesis 1:26.

²⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, p. 12.

²⁵ Hoekema, *op.cit.* p. 14.

²⁶ Jorge E. Maldonado, *Introducción al Asesoramiento Pastoral de la Familia*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004, p. 23.

²⁷ Note that Dr. Maldonado used the term "advice" to define the activity that has been defined here as counseling.

²⁸ Colossians 1:19-20.

²⁹ Pablo A. Jiménez, "Bases Bíblicas y Teológicas de la Consejería Pastoral." In *Psicología y Consejo Pastoral: Perspectivas Hispánicas*, by Daniel S. Schipani, Pablo Jiménez, eds., 27-40. Decatur, GA: Libros AETH, p.29.

³⁰ Pat Contreras Ulloa, "Por Una Psicología Pastoral que Acompañe y Desafíe a las Iglesias Latinoamericanas." In *Dimensiones del cuidado y asesoramiento pastoral: Aportes desde América Latina y el Caribe*, by Hugo N. Santos, ed. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2006, pp. 23-40.

³¹ In order to not complicate things even more, we will use the terms pastoral psychology and pastoral counseling synonymously. This position invites a heated debate because, although the concepts are closely related, there are clear differences between them. Just to mention one, someone can argue that pastoral psychology refers to the theoretical discipline of the integrated pastoral psychology practice of the church, while pastoral counseling refers to the same activity of implementing psychological theories and concepts to shepherd others. One emphasizes the theoretical, while the other focuses on the practice.

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